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SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM
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JERUSALEM ALSO FOR ICD
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PARIS ALSO FOR POL
ROME FOR MFO
E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: IS_KMDR MEDIA REACTION REPORT
SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

Mideast

Key stories in the media:

Leading media reported on the aftermath of talks held Monday by top Sharon aide Dov Weisglass and Israel's National Security Advisor Giora Eiland with senior U.S. Administration officials (National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice and Secretary of State Colin Powell): Ha'aretz reported that the participants agreed that another round of talks is necessary before PM Sharon visits Washington. Citing Reuters, Israel Radio quoted a White House official as saying that the U.S. is not yet prepared to adopt Sharon's disengagement plan, that Israel has not provided detailed plans and that a disengagement that would bring about a withdrawal from the Gaza Strip must reduce the tension between Israel and the Palestinians and that no side should impose permanent steps on the other side.

Ha'aretz reported that the U.S. complained through several channels that Israel did not notify it of its intention to raid several Palestinian banks, despite reports that the preparations for the action took months. The newspaper also reported that the U.S. was unhappy about the lack of reports from Israel after the raids. Jerusalem Post, Yediot and Hatzofe reported that Monday the Tel Aviv District Court placed a temporary lien on the approximately 40 million shekels (around USD 9 million) in funding for terrorist organizations seized by security officials from Ramallah banks last week, as requested by the family of two victims of terrorism.

Jerusalem Post reported that Monday the U.S. Supreme Court rejected an appeal from the Holy Land Foundation for Relief and Development to reverse a U.S. decision to freeze and designate the charity a terrorist group in 2001.

Israel TV reported that Sharon told Labor Party Chairman Shimon Peres that 10 West Bank settlements will be removed, along with all those in the Gaza Strip. Jerusalem Post reported that FM Silvan Shalom defended the security fence and the planned disengagement when he met senior members of the British media on Monday. Leading media reported that Shalom is expected to meet with British PM Tony Blair and British FM Jack Straw today.

All media led with the investigation of Elchanan Tenenbaum and its implications, as he is slated to undergo a comprehensive lie detector test today that will determine whether he will be freed or tried. Commentators noted that Israeli courts do not accept the results of such tests.

Israel Radio reported that Khalil al-Zebin, who was media advisor to PA Chairman Yasser Arafat in Beirut and Tunis, was assassinated in Gaza early today. The radio reported that a small Palestinian group which had claimed responsibility for the assault on Egyptian FM Ahmed Maher in Jerusalem in December 2003 took credit for the murder. A radio commentator said that the chaos that allows small groups to act has apparently reached Arafat's surroundings.

Jerusalem Post reported that a Sunday meeting with Jewish leaders and politicians, Sen. John Kerry, the Democratic presidential front-runner, pledged his strong support for Israel and vowed not to follow the

Oslo path.

Yediot reported that Israel has complained to the U.S. Embassy about an increase in the rejection of visa applications. The newspaper noted that in his meeting with Ambassador Daniel Kurtzer during the weekend, Deputy Foreign Ministry D-G Yoram Ben Zeev demanded of Kurtzer that he cancel the waiting time for Israelis born in Arab states. Ben Zeev also reportedly raised the issue of high-tech workers and other scientists who must wait for months to get visas. The newspaper cited Kurtzer's response that he cannot promise an improvement of the situation in the foreseeable future, and that Washington decides directly on both above-mentioned cases.

Ha'aretz noted that Russian President Vladimir Putin's choice for the post of PM, former ambassador to the EU Mikhail Fradkov, is the son of a Jew.

Maariv quoted Israeli security sources as warning that Palestinian terrorists could make foreign workers carry out attacks.

Ha'aretz and Jerusalem Post reported that Monday Israel Aircraft Industries (IAI) conducted a successful test launch of a long-range artillery missile (LORA), which Ha'aretz says is apparently meant for sale to India.

Ha'aretz reported on a dialogue between Irish-American author Frank McCourt and Jerusalem high-school students. McCourt, who won a Pulitzer Prize for his memoir, "Angela's Ashes," is in Israel as part of a State Department-sponsored program that started after the 9/11 attacks.

Jerusalem Post reported that the New York Tolerance Center, a branch of the Los Angeles-based Simon Wiesenthal Center, opened Sunday in the heart of Manhattan.

Mideast:

Summary:

Senior op-ed writer Akiva Eldar opined in left-leaning, independent Ha'aretz: "[The Americans] take into account that the Prime Minister understands that without the Labor Party, he does not have the political strength to move a flower pot from a single windowsill in any of the illegal outposts on the Gaza coast, let alone on the West Bank."

Right-wing (National Union) Knesset Member Aryeh Eldad wrote in mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "Will we demand that the President of the United States save us from the devastating consequences of a move he didn't want?"

Conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized: "We know that Kerry hunts doves, loves Israel, and has Jewish family. But Israel's security is at stake. We need to know more about how he would handle [the] Arab-Israeli conflict."

Correspondent Efraim Ganor wrote in popular, pluralist Russian-language Novosty Nedely: "[Arafat] understands that the worse the situation in the Palestinian Authority, the easier for him to force terror [against Israel]."

Author Ruhama Shattan wrote in Jerusalem Post: "On the first anniversary of her death, I want to thank Rachel Corrie for showing Palestinian children how to despise America."

Block Quotes:

I. "If He Walks Like a Foreign Minister and Talks Like a Foreign Minister, Will He Be Foreign Minister?"

Senior op-ed writer Akiva Eldar opined in left-leaning, independent Ha'aretz (March 2): "The Americans, like the Europeans and Egyptians, know how to count the votes against the withdrawal plan among Sharon's colleagues in the Likud and other parties. They take into account that the Prime Minister understands that without the Labor Party, he does not have the political strength to move a flower pot from a single windowsill in any of the illegal outposts on the Gaza coast, let alone on the West Bank. They also assume that the Prime Minister knows that the seat under his good friend George W. Bush is beginning to shake.... since Sharon publicized his disengagement plan, Peres has

been explaining that this time Sharon is serious. For the first time, he points out, Sharon is not conditioning anything on Palestinian steps, like the seven days of quiet. The only condition, which derives from the unilateralism of the move, is that the Palestinians not do anything. Peres is already equipped with polls showing that the public in general, and Labor voters in particular, are overwhelmingly in favor of joining the government the day the extreme right leaves due to its opposition to the disengagement plan."

II. "Sharon and Mofaz Have No Plan"

Right-wing (National Union) Knesset Member Aryeh Eldad wrote in mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (March 2): "Even those who were absolutely opposed to the Oslo Agreement, claiming that the Arabs wouldn't fill their part in the accord, can't deny that it contained a diplomatic move in which the enemy committed himself to certain steps. Also, those who denounced the Geneva Accord as an unauthorized, non-mandated national suicide must admit that it is an agreement between sides, which still includes an internal logical configuration of negotiations. But Sharon and Mofaz have no clue of what will happen in the Gaza Strip if the IDF flees from there. There is no agreement. Therefore nobody can promise that the Arab murderers won't procure strategic weapons. What will Israel do to them?.... Will we demand that the President of the United States save us from the devastating consequences of a move he didn't want?.... The Prime Minister and the Defense Minister don't think two steps ahead. They have no plan."

III. "Kerry's Fence Straddle"

Conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (March 2): "In today's 'Super Tuesday' primaries, John Kerry is expected to cinch his party's nomination.... Based on his own statements, to Kerry the fence is both necessary and a 'barrier to peace.' The West Bank is a matter for negotiations, yet anything over the Green Line (where Kerry seems to think the fence should have been built) is 'Palestinian territory.' Kerry has spoken movingly of his deep connection to Israel. But so did Bill Clinton. Kerry is considered 'pro-Israel,' as is almost every candidate for national office in the U.S. But after the failure of Oslo, the current war, and 9/11, people who care about Israel, including millions of Americans, have a right to know more about what a Kerry presidency would really mean.... We know that Kerry hunts doves, loves Israel, and has Jewish family. But Israel's security is at stake. We need to know more about how he would handle [the] Arab-Israeli conflict when he is not speaking to Jewish leaders just before the New York primary."

IV. "Developing Anarchy "

Correspondent Efraim Ganor wrote in popular, pluralist Russian-language Novosty Nedely (March 1): "Anarchy in the Palestinian [Authority] is not a surprise for the Israeli security forces.... Does Arafat know about this? Of course!.... He understands that the worse the situation in the Palestinian Authority, the easier for him to force terror [against Israel]. Hungry and miserable people who have nothing to lose would wear a 'shahid's [suicide bomber's] belt' more willingly than those who are able to work and feed their families. With his stolen billions [of dollars] Arafat considers himself invulnerable. Actually, it's true; therefore, the situation in the Palestinian Authority, if it changes at all, would change to the worse for Israel".

V. "A 'Tribute' to Rachel Corrie"

Author Ruhama Shattan wrote in Jerusalem Post (March 2): "On the first anniversary of her death, I want to thank [the late American peace activist] Rachel Corrie for showing Palestinian children how to despise America as she snarled, burned an American flag, and led them in chanting slogans, and as she gave 'evidence' at a Young Palestinian Parliament mock trial finding President Bush guilty of crimes against humanity. Perhaps her help in fanning the flames of violent anti-American sentiment led to the October 2003 bombing of the Fulbright delegation to Gaza to interview scholarship candidates, killing three. There will be no new crop of Palestinian Fulbright scholars this fall."